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SUBJECT: PATRIARCH KIRILL'S VISIT AND UKRAINE'S ORTHODOX
DIVIDE

(U) Sensitive but unclassified, please handle accordingly.

Summary

¶1. (SBU) Church leaders in Ukraine are preparing for the visit of Kirill, Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) later this month. The Ukrainian branch of the ROC hopes to avoid controversy by emphasizing the religious purpose of Kirill's visit. The second largest Orthodox community in Ukraine, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarchate, has expressed concern about Patriarch Kirill's alleged anti-Ukrainian views. They warned that if Kirill takes political "initiatives", then "the public has a right to respond." End summary.

2008 Visit Mired in Controversy

¶2. (U) Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) will conduct in July his first official visit to Ukraine since becoming head of the ROC in February 2009. This follows the July 2008 visit of ROC Patriarch Aleksiy II, which was surrounded in controversy. President Yushchenko had invited the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, without consulting the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate, to also participate in the anniversary of the Baptism of the Kyivan Rus. Observers believe that Yushchenko hoped the Ecumenical Patriarch would take steps to unite Ukraine's divided Orthodox community under his authority during the 2008 visit. Yushchenko warmly welcomed the Ecumenical Patriarch and was seen as snubbing ROC Patriarch Aleksiy. In response, Russia's MFA angrily complained about "disrespectful" treatment.

Divided Orthodox Community

¶3. (SBU) Yushchenko has supported the creation of a united Ukrainian Orthodox Church independent from Moscow's influence. Currently, Ukraine's Orthodox community is split between two major churches. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) is an autonomous branch of the ROC lead by Metropolitan Volodymyr. The Moscow Patriarchate will host Patriarch Kirill during his upcoming visit. The second largest Orthodox community is the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP), established soon after Ukrainian independence under the leadership of Patriarch Filaret. The Moscow Patriarchate considers the Kyiv Patriarchate schismatic.

ROC Patriarch Kirill To Visit Holodomor Memorial

¶4. (U) The Moscow Patriarchate announced that Patriarch Kirill would visit Orthodox monasteries in Kyiv, Donetsk Oblast, and Ternopol Oblast and the historic Chersonesos site

in Crimea during his July 27-August 5 visit. The Patriarch will also have a short meeting with President Yushchenko and then join him in wreath-laying ceremonies at monuments to the unknown soldier and victims of the Holodomor in Kyiv. The Moscow Patriarchate's spokesman emphasized that this would be a pastoral, not a political visit.

15. (SBU) Archimandrite Kirill Hovorun, responsible for the Moscow Patriarchate's external relations, told Emboff that the church hoped to avoid what it saw as "political interference" during Patriarch Aleksiy's 2008 visit. He expressed hope that the visit could help unite Ukrainian society during "difficult" times. Hovorun emphasized that the church has a new "paradigm" and would not support political parties - an apparent reference the UOC-MP's support for Viktor Yanukovych during the 2004 presidential campaign. Hovorun concluded that Kirill would make efforts to be respectful of Ukrainian sensitivities during his visit.

Kyiv Patriarchate Says Kirill is Anti-Ukrainian

16. (SBU) Kyiv Patriarchate spokesman Bishop Yevstrati told reporters if Patriarch Kirill's visit were strictly pastoral, the UOC-KP would respect his right as a church leader to visit his community. However, Yevstrati noted Patriarch Kirill's "anti-Ukrainian positions" and said that he "can hardly expect a warm and hearty welcome in Ukraine." Yevstrati later told Emboff that Kirill wants to limit the UOC-MP's autonomy from the ROC and eventually integrate it into the Russian church. Yevstrati objected to Kirill's recent statement that Kyiv is the southern capital of Russian

Orthodoxy. Yevstrati described limited contacts with the UOC-MP in recent years, a new development, and believes that UOC-MP Metropolitan Volodymyr supports greater autonomy for his church. He reiterated that the UOC-KP does not oppose a pastoral visit, but if Kirill takes on political "initiatives", Yevstrati warned that the public "has a right to respond."

Greek Catholic Church Calls for Understanding

17. (U) Cardinal Lyubomyr Huzar, head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church commented to the press that he supported Patriarch Kirill's planned visit) as long as it was strictly pastoral. He explained that such visits by religious leaders are a normal practice. Huzar's representative for external affairs, Father Roman Nebozhuk, told Emboff that his church hopes Ukraine will project a positive image during the visit and show that an independent Ukraine is not a threat to Russia.

Government Representative: Not a State Visit

18. (SBU) The Chairman of the State Committee for Nationalities and Religions, Yuri Reshitnikov, told Emboff that he viewed Kirill's visit as a church matter, and not a state visit. He explained that his committee does not have responsibility for planning but is assisting with preparations.

Comment

19. (SBU) Patriarch Kirill's decision to visit the Holodomor memorial is significant since the GOR has pointedly refused to do so. President Yushchenko has angered the Kremlin in his efforts to gain recognition of the 1932-33 famine as an act of genocide against the Ukrainian people. By visiting this monument and emphasizing the pastoral nature of the visit, Kirill may deflect criticism that he is coming to promote Russian state interests.

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